1. Auctions, play rehearsals and social parties

Social occasions, like social organizations, are configurations of behavior oriented about some purpose. In social organizations the purpose is usually specified as the goal of the organization (1). In social occasions, the purpose is usually specified as the main activity of the occasion. In this sense then, the pattern of purposive behavior provides the structure of the occasion or the organization. But it is obviously not the case that the structural properties of the occasion or the organization exhaust the range of possible behavior which can occur at the occasion or in the organization. While the structure of an auction specifies that the lines of communication will be between auctioneer and bidders, two bidders may engage in a conversation between themselves; and while the structure of an office specifies that the lines of communication will be between the manager and the clerks, two clerks may engage in a conversation between themselves. In both situations, these non-specified communications may have reference to the specified purpose or activity or not; the two bidders may talk about the weather or the price at which each will stop bidding and the two clerks may also talk about the weather or when each will do their respective tasks.

Ecological character and temporal patterns: Though social organizations do have an ecological character and a temporal pattern, these are rarely a focus of attention in traditional organizational analysis. In general, most social organizations are connected with specific locations, such as special buildings or rooms, but some social organizations are carried out in diverse physical locations. Some church services occur not only in churches, but also stores, tents and sometimes even private homes. Similarly, while social organizations extend over time, when the activity of the organization occurs can vary. Bureaucracies usually operate 8-5 on weekdays, churches operate primarily on Sunday mornings and some factories operate around the clock, weekdays and weekend.

Most auctions occur in auction studios, most play rehearsals occur in theaters and most social parties occur at places of residence. But none of these social occasions are rigidly bound to a specific location. When the goods to be auctioned off are not easily transported, the auction may be held where the goods are located, such as at a factory or a private estate. When a theater is unavailable or the case is small, a play rehearsal may be held in a private home or a garage. When the number of guests is very large or when a special event is planned, social parties may be held in a rented hall or at the beach.

An auction is usually a specific event which is carried on over an extended period of time. The auction is divided into a preview period, during which the goods to be auctioned off are displayed, and a bidding period, during which time the goods are sold. While the preview is usually defined by clock and calendar time, e.g. Sunday, from 10-4, the bidding is defined by action time. That is, though it is started by the clock and calendar, it is ended only when the action of auctioning off the goods is completed (although this action may be conventionally interrupted for specific lengths of time, such as from midnight until 10 the next morning.) A play rehearsal is usually part of a series of events which occurs during a specified period of clock and calendar time, much like an auction preview. But while the auction preview ends when it is scheduled to end, a rehearsal may extend beyond the scheduled time of termination.
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Social parties are like auctions in that they are specific events, and like rehearsals in that their time period is usually specified beforehand, though again, social parties may extend beyond their scheduled end.

Structural properties: The structure of both occasions and organizations can be analyzed in terms of the way in which the activity of the occasion or the organization is distributed among the participants, that is, in terms of role behavior. (2) But again, while roles may be specified which are important with respect to the goals of the organization or the main activity of the occasion, this here and now identity of the participants need not exhaust the range of role behavior which can occur within the structural setting. Both office workers and guests can also behave in terms of various latent social roles, such as males and females, friends and enemies. (3)

Auctions, rehearsals and parties can all be described in terms of a general three fold division of roles: (1) The Organizer, who has the primary responsibility for seeing that the occasion comes off as the occasion that it should be (the auctioneer, the director and the host) (2) The Artisans, who engage in the work of the occasion's main activity (bidders, actors and guests) and (3) The Attendants, who take care of the technical aspects of the occasion (auction clerks, stagehands, maids).

All three social occasions can also be carried on in the presence of onlookers, who are physically present, but do not take an active part in the occasion (e.g. people who wander into the auction studio, drop by the theater or children who sit on the stairs at a party.) (4) If attendants are not utilized, at auctions and social parties their tasks usually will be taken over by the organizer, while at rehearsals these tasks will be taken over by the artisans.

Auctions, rehearsals and parties vary in the degree to which the roles of organizer, artisans and attendants can overlap. In auctions and rehearsals, the only person who can carry out the organizer's tasks is that person who is originally delegated to the position. At parties, the guests may in fact take over some of the tasks of the host, such as offering drinks, introducing other guests, etc. Attendants at parties must engage in only their technical tasks, but stagehands at rehearsals may read lines for missing actors and auction clerks can be delegated as proxies for absent bidders. The organizer at parties and rehearsals may engage in the activities of the artisans: the director may have a role in the play and the host may relax and be a guest at his own party. On the other hand, the auctioneer cannot enter into the bidding.

Auctions, rehearsals and parties also differ in the degree to which the events which constitute the main activity of the occasion involve the artisans. The responsibility of bidding and sociability is not specified according to each artisan, and once the proceedings have started, individual bidders and guests can come and go during the course of events at their own discretion. On the other hand, in as much as the responsibility of various play parts is specifically delegated to individual actors, when an actor will be involved in the proceedings is not a matter of his choice.

2. Ibid., p.35-36
4. This is similar to the role division in R. Barker & H. Wright, Midwest and Its Children, Row, Peterson & Co, 1935, p.69
3. Q2:

The taped occasion to be analyzed was a radio broadcast of a concert. For the audience present in the physical setting of the concert, the events taking place on the stage provide the official focus of attention. As such, it is expected that there be some degree of involvement in the main activity on the part of those present. The involvement of an audience in a performance in one sense provides a measure by which the success or failure of that performance can be calculated. But since the audience itself plays no part in the actual production of the performance, there is less constraint upon the audience to act as if they were involved with the stage events when they are not. In this sense the involvement of the audience of a performance differs from the involvement of the participants in face to face interaction, since the participants in face to face interaction usually have some active part in the production of the main activity, and therefore have a greater responsibility to be involved in the events which constitute that activity. This is not to say that there is no constraint upon the audience to be involved, but rather that the structure of performances differ from the structure of face to face interaction in such a way as to permit greater freedom in audience involvement than in participant involvement.

If performances have a general pattern with respect to the nature of audience involvement, it is that the audience remains in a state of silent expectation during the actual events of the performance and then express the degree to which they were involved by applause, or equivalent behavior, at specified times. If performances come off as they should come off, the feedback concerning audience involvement that the performers should get is silence during the performance and applause at the end of the event, or at the entrance of the star, or after a particularly brilliant sequence, etc. During the concert itself, the involvement of the audience appeared to vary, in as much as at times there was complete silence and at other times there was much coughing, movement, laughter and remarks of a desensitizing nature. On the other hand, since the audience expects that the performance will present something to become involved in, the signs of the lack of involvement of the audience appeared to increase during those times when the performance was composed of complete silence, up to that point when it appeared that the audience realized that a performance was really still occurring, and then, even though nothing new occurred on stage, (in the audible sense) the activity in the audience tended to diminish. It would seem then that the occasion itself may provide a definition of what in fact is occurring and in this way may constrain behavior to a degree, even if what is supposed to occur does not always materialize. Another example of this was the applause at the termination of each piece. No matter how much it appeared that the audience could not have cared less for the events on stage, in terms of the amount of noise, remarks and laughter which occurred during the performance, at the end of each piece, applause was forthcoming. Such applause may be more indicative of paying respect to the occasion itself, if not to the actual events which constituted that occasion.

The audience present to the radio broadcast differs from the audience which is present at the staged performance. For all practical purposes, the radio audience is not involved in any direct counterpart to face to face interaction, in so far as there is no mutual monitoring of behavior. If this were the only way in which the two types of audiences differed, the radio audience would be of no concern for the present analysis, since our interest has not been the problem of mass impression. But the broadcast brings out one aspect of the difference
face to face interaction and mass impression. This is the fact that the radio audience is not merely indirectly present to the actual performance, but they are present to a commentary on that performance as well. And the nature of this commentary is such that, if it were to occur during the actual staged performance, it would be an improper event. Such commentaries on performances in mass impression typically appear to be composed of a blend of the actual events of the performance plus bits of backstage information. For example, in a recent radio broadcast of a baseball game, the radio audience was told not only that Willy Mays was up at bat (an event which was being seen by the audience present at the game) but also that he had just gotten to the stadium after being involved in a court dispute with his ex-wife. An example of this from the taped concert was the announcer's remarks about not only what the audience was about to hear (the counterpart of the performance program) but also what some of the technical difficulties and problems might be. It may be that mass impressions, unlike performances, include a certain amount of structured collusion between the performers (or the performer's proxies) and the audience, which serves the function of increasing audience involvement in lieu of the ability to directly control that involvement by means of mutual monitoring of behavior. This is to say that the dispersed audience may feel responsible to attend to what is occurring because they are in possession of inside information rather than because they are in the presence of others.

The activity of the class presents a very different problem. In the first place, the occasion is different. Rather than being an audience to a performance, the members of the class are participants in a mediated form of interaction, an examination, in which the concert performance is only a small part of the main event of the occasion. Involvement in the performance is secondary to the immediate problem of answering the examination question.

Furthermore, where the audience physically present at the concert can control the events of the concert more or less directly, in terms of the feedback of their immediate reaction to the performance, the members of the class can control the events of the examination only indirectly, in terms of the degree to which they can properly respond to the question which has been presented to them. (1)

Finally, not only is the occasion the type of interaction and subsequent potential for control different, but failure to control these events costs the concert audience less, in as much as their investment in the main activity of the occasion is less. At most they have invested their reputation as connoisseurs of avant-garde music in the event, while the members of the class have invested a portion of their professional in the event. In this sense, in so far as the magnitude of these commitments are recognized, the members of the class are likely to be more deeply (and consistently) involved in the activity they are participating in than are the members of the concert audience. (2)

And it did seem to be the case that there was less extraneous activity (as a measure of lack of involvement) within the class than might have been the case if there had not been such a high commitment.

(1) T. Burns, "The Forms of Conduct," AJS, 64:137-157, 1958, p.150